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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA/FO, SA/A, S/CT, EUR/RPM
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SUBJECT: Poetry and Motion - Sikhs and Hindus Return to Paktia Province

¶11. (SBU) Summary: A November 11 poetry reading hosted by the Paktia Literary Society not only opened Gardez's new Afghan Government-built Marriage Hall but also revealed significant progress in the faith of the people in the GOA. A three hour gathering of some 300 Pashto men in Gardez's unheated Marriage Hall revealed little if any fear of the Taliban or other insurgents and provided the surprising revelation that some 60 Sikh and six Hindu families intend to return to Paktia from long exile in India. End Summary.

Poetry Against Violence - The Pen takes on the Sword

¶12. (SBU) In Gardez, a well-attended meeting of the Paktia Literary Society featured some 20 poets reciting their latest works. In attendance were some 300 Pashto men from Gardez as well as the more remote districts of Paktia province. The gathering included provincial notables such as Governor Taniwal and members of the newly elected Provincial Council. In a short speech Dr. Abdul Hadi, the head of the Literary Society, explained they were gathered to encourage the people to embrace their own culture in the Pashto language. He stressed that this was a culture of the pen, not of the weapon. Poets spoke movingly of their love for Paktia and Afghanistan and at least one repeatedly ridiculed the former rulers of Afghanistan, including the Taliban. In a surprising turn an Afghan Sikh recited a moving poem about his love for the mountains of Paktia and his desire to return from exile in India to the land of his birth.

Love of Country and Ridicule of Taliban

¶13. (SBU) The poetry focused on two main themes: love of country and ridicule for past governments including the Communists, Mujahideen and Taliban. Several poets spoke movingly of the destruction of the country, its people, natural resources, and infrastructure. One especially articulate poet, Fiazullah Zazi, from Jaji District located on Paktia's border with Pakistan, exploded with humorous ridicule of Afghanistan's past rulers, especially the Taliban. Resembling more of a standup comedian than the serious poet he clearly is, Fiazullah spoke for over 30 minutes of the three-hour session. His popularity was clearly demonstrated by the intense and long-lasting laughter that repeatedly disrupted his oration and the standing ovation given him as he stepped down from the podium. Displaying the raw intelligence and courage of the Afghan people, Faizullah, who is 29 years old and a tire repairman by trade, is also illiterate, keeping the repertoire of his poems in his head.

Sikhs and Hindus Return to Paktia

¶14. (SBU) Dia Singh, a 40 year old Sikh born and raised in Paktia province, recited a poem about his love for his home in the mountains of Paktia. Well accepted and roundly applauded, Dia Singh was very clear about his intention to return to Gardez after two decades of exile in New Delhi. In a private conversation, Dia Singh related that 60 Sikh and six Hindu families intend to return to Gardez in 2006. Governor Taniwal has approved 84 parcels of land (housing plots) just south of Gardez city for them.

¶15. (SBU) COMMENT: That poet are now willing to standup in a public forum, in rural eastern Afghanistan, and openly ridicule the leadership of the former Taliban government is a strong indicator of the success of the Karzai government and the Coalition efforts in Paktia and Afghanistan. That laughter and applause are liberally applied to these comments also provides strong evidence the public no longer has much, if any, fear of what remains of the Taliban. The planned return of 66 Hindu and Sikh families from India to Paktia province also shows that trust in the present Afghan government to provide peace, security, and stability is growing more widespread. If these events are possible in the more turbulent areas of eastern Afghanistan, it bodes well for other, more developed and stable areas in the north and west of the country. END COMMENT.

NEUMANN